



## GRINDING DOWN THEIR SYSTEM ONE CURB AT A TIME

I initially knew Max as the drummer from SPAZZ (M.I.P.); I was a huge fan of the band. Known as "Hirax Max" to his wife, he has played in millions of bands from SPOONCRACK to SPAZZ to CAPITALIST CASUALTIES to WHAT HAPPENS NEXT to SOULASTIC DEATH. He has written extensively about hardcore from a dance perspective doing a nine-volume *Mosh of Ass*, writing for *SHRIMP*, *FEAR*, and *LOUIE* and doing a column for *Maximum Rockroll*. Max started the label, 625 Productions, in '83, originally focusing on the first day parties of thrash core bands from that period. He is approaching his hundredth release with no signs of slowing down, having released and co-released over great things like the *Possessed* to *Sixty* comp, the *Sanctuary* Thrash series, the SPAZZ/CHARLES LAWSON split, the *Sanctuary* Thrash 1001, the *KURBITS* 1001 EP, the *STRENGTH* discography, and the *BURTON* 3001 1001. He has helped the North American hear about great bands like the *JELLYBALL* ROCKERS, *DIS-CHARGE*, *D.R.I.*, *YOUTH ENEMY*, *POINT OF VIEW*, *JUNESTRUCK*, *CARBON*, and *QUARTER* *STREET* *ME*. He has released great bands from here like *CHARLES LAWSON*, *CRUCIAL ATTACK*, *WARM/COOL*, *FLYING CRAB*, and *SIXTY* *2* *FRIGIDS*. And he has worked hard at unearthing some greats like *HELL*, *SKATES* *SECRET*, the *SKRIBITS*, and the soon-to-be-released *HEATED* *THEMATIC* collection. We have become good friends from being pen pals over the years, sharing a funhouse for *Japan* and current *Japanese* *Hardcore*. I was flattered when the idea came up that I should do a label profile on 625 Productions, because it is my favorite record label. I was also taken aback, as I figured so many other folks would keep him better who ought to be from the Bay Area. But we started with a few emails, keeping in touch about the philosophy of what I think will be one of the most influential labels of our time. Interview by Stephen Perry

**MRR: How did you get the name Hirax Max?**

Hirax Max: That was just SPAZZ goofing around, making fun of punk names and such. I was sitting there with Dan and I was saying, "Man, I'm screwed with the name Max. I can't have some cool punk name." So we started coming up with really stupid names and since we were always joking around about the band HIRAX, that came up. It's kinda a wart on my identity now. I'll travel and I'll meet someone at a show and go, "Hey, my name is Max, what's yours?" and sometimes I'll get "Oh I know, the Hirax Max."

**MRR: Your label seems to have some crossover into metal. What is your history with metal? What were you into first, metal or hardcore?**

Hirax Max: Good question, really; and the more I think about it, the more I realize that I got into both at the same time. My sister had a huge influence on me. Not so much that I looked up to her more than in any other brother/sister relationship, but because she was involved in the local punk scene around '81 and '82, so we had a ton of bands and people over to our house when I was young. I heard a lot of stuff being played, and she took me to some shows where I was exposed to some bands. This was when I was in fourth grade, around '83, when I was 10. It was like there was this sound that I heard every now and then that perked my ears. I couldn't describe it, and I didn't know what it was, but I knew it when I heard it. So I started to look for it on my own. I bought Ozzy Records at Gemco (now known as Target) and other things, and I just never found that sound. It wasn't until I got the *Bones Brigade* video show with the *FAC-TION* song in the intro that I heard that sound I was looking for, and that same year my sister kicked me down a tape of a local metal band she was checking out, which turned out to be METALLICA's first record. Both those things had the sound that I had heard in my sister's room, or at the shows she took me too. And once I started buying records like *DIS-CHARGE*, *D.R.I.*, and *SUICIDAL TENDENCIES*, or early *SLAYER* records, I started to realize there were all these different ways to make that sound.

**MRR: So was it your sister that got you into hardcore?**

Hirax Max: Yeah, it was my sister. She was going to shows at this place called the Varsity Theater in Palo Alto, in the suburbs of San Francisco. So every time there was a tour going through the Farm or the Vats or On Broadway or Ruthies, the bands would play there too. There was this amazing scene, hundreds of kids would come from all over, and bands like *PLH*, *WHIPPING BOY*, *RIBZY*, *GRIM REALITY*, *SOCIAL UNREST*, *MISTAKEN IDENTITY*, *ARMISTICE*, *EXECUTIONER*, and *HALF CHURCH* would open the shows. So my sister knew these bands and we would have people over to the house all the time. I got to be accepted by these older kids—my sister was seven years older than me—and pretty soon, my sister was sneaking me out to shows. She wanted to show me off to her friends like, "Here's my dorky little brother." But that really fucked me up for life cuz from then on, I was hooked. She got out of it around '83-'84, got really into the LA death rock stuff, but she still hung out with punks. But she kicked me all her records. So I got the

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Hirax Max: As for RAPED TEENAGERS, that band never got the credit they deserved at all. I would talk to my friends in high school about RT and they would kinda shrug it off like it was just too eclectic for them. Their first EP and MLPs are so amazing. Even the later stuff is done so well. So I talked to Henrik from OUT-  
LAST/DEAD END and I told him how much I loved RT and he said, "They are from my home town." So we got in contact with them, and Henrik was able to get some old demo and unreleased material. It's being dropped to DAT tape right now, so I should have some stuff to master in a few months. Kids will drop a load when they hear the old RAPED TEENAGERS stuff.

MRR: Do you have any other discographies in the works? What would you like to see released on terms of some hardcore classics that have not gotten the attention they deserve?

Hirax Max: Other discographies in the works are FLASH GORDON (they are still going) and a SPIT-FIRE collection. SPITFIRE are this amazing HC band from Sapporo that existed from '87 to '89. The whole Sapporo scene in the mid-80s got glanced over since they weren't playing metallic crossover like the famous Tokyo bands and whatnot. The kids up there were more influenced by the older US hardcore bands like MINOR THREAT and SOA. So I'm at Mitch's house from FACE OF CHANGE and he throws on this video from SPITFIRE and I couldn't believe it. It was like a LIFE'S HALT show nowadays but from '88 in Sapporo. I'm going to put their demo and a live show on a CD along with the same video footage that I saw. It really is amazing. I'm trying to get some of the older Sapporo bands out so people can hear a bit of Japanese HC history that was overlooked at the time and long since forgotten about.

MRR: You also have a history for putting out some of the most righteous comps from the Bandanna Thrash flexi to the Barbaric Thrash series. These comps are on par with Cleanse the Bacteria. But comps are so labor intensive. You have some new ones out as well, including the Murderous Grind Attack and the Four Corners comp. I get the sense that you are exposed to so much hardcore you wish you could put out and comps enable you to come close to reaching that mandate? Why do you do comps? Do you have any comps in the works?

Hirax Max: Oh shit man, you're blowing smoke up my butt. I think others would agree with me that the comps I do are not comparable to Cleanse or others, but thanks for making that comparison. It's flattering, dude. The way I think about comps, or I should say, the comps that I would like to emulate, are more of the sampler comps, the ones that expose bands either for the first time, or bring together bands from all over onto one format. Some of my favorite comps, put out by one of my favorite labels, MCR, are the Unknown HC Drunkards Flexi series or the Best Run Fast Series. They focused on new bands, gave them space for two or three songs to strut their stuff. Some of those bands didn't even do anything after that, while others went onto be the ones we regard as classics. Another label that did awesome comps is Adventure Family Records out of Yokohama. They covered bands from scenes that were outside of the major cities in Japan. Other examples of my favorites would be the old BCT tape comps, or the old Ataque Frontal LP comps from Brazil.

It's really easy for a label to go "OK, I'm going to ask all my favorite bands for one song and I'll have this killer comp," but what's the point? It's too easy to go after all the hyped-bands and try to make some monumental comp.

And yes, your question does get to another point. I buy, trade, and get a million demos, so I'm exposed to all these killer bands. So I think man, wouldn't it be awesome for these people to get a little exposure. That's the concept behind the newer versions of the Barbaric Thrash series; taking bands from all over the world that just released a demo and compiling them on one format. The next is Volume III and will have 34 bands from all over the world on 2 CDs with a bonus EP that has a great, old ASOCIAL demo on it where they are playing 1000mph HC. It's going to be

an insane double CD with an EP in a 7" booklet. I'm working on Volume IV right now, as well and am planning a few regionally focused versions of it later: Brazil, SE Asia, Northern California, etc. I feel more inspired by that approach to comps.

MRR: You have a fondness for demo formats. So much so that you've done demo-only zines like Mosh of Ass. I used to read your contributions to Short, Fast & Loud and the column that you used to do for Maximum religiously. What is the appeal behind demos? For me, it is the rawness of a recording, the energy that hasn't been killed by studio production. I also like the accessibility of the format for smaller runs and the exclusivity for those in the know. What is the appeal with demos?

Hirax Max: I love doing MOA. I get to sit down for a few hours each day and listen to a few tapes and review them. You know, sitting there with a Walkman on, folding out the cover and trying to get a sense of this new band. Like I said before, some of the best stuff a band does is on their demo.

Some of the time, I like the recording quality better on demos, sometimes you can get a really good raw recording out of a 4-track. So yeah, I agree, studios sometimes kill a band. About the accessibility factor, I think demos are an easy format you can reproduce at will, and when given consent, people in other places can record the demo for their friends, or through their tape distro. There are a few people in Western Europe and the US who are still doing tape labels, or started tape labels...like RISK here in SF. But in Eastern Europe and SE Asia, tape labels are THE way music gets around. I work with a few labels in Malaysia in order for them to reproduce a CD that 625 puts out for their tape labels; the music gets around that way. So I see it in another light than exclusivity. I think it increases availability in places where most people don't have record players or CD players. But yes, Western punks are more inclined to buy a "legitimate" release on vinyl or CD format before they send \$3 in the mail to get a tape.

Another reason that I tend to like demos is that anyone can go out and do it. All you need is some cash to buy some blank tapes, a tape recorder, and a copy place near your house and you have a demo. Sell 'em for \$2, give 'em away for free, doesn't matter. It's easy, cheap, and completely DIY. Once we start talking about vinyl and CDs, we're talking about having to start with \$500 or \$1000 to make 'em. I'm down for CDR demos in theory, since it's the same thing basically (you producing and manufacturing your own music cheaply). But then again, CDs have that digital sound that I don't really like. And finally, I like demos out of nostalgia. When I was younger, bands would open shows for years without any records coming out. They would be the biggest band in an area,

drawing 200 people, and they still only had demos, so you would just get all these demos from your local bands. And once I started learning how to write bands and mail-order, based on info. out of MRR—Walter Glaser reviews were like my bible, he would say, "This band is faster than D.R.I." and my \$3 was in an envelope in 5 minutes—I got all these demos straight from the bands that were



BREAKFAST "VERTIGO"



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great, which are now all being released on CDs or in discographies.

**MRR: Will you get back to writing any time soon?**

Hirax Max: Honestly, I don't feel comfortable writing or being in print—which is kind of a contradiction since I'm doing this interview, yeah. I felt weird every month sitting down in front of a computer and going "OK, this is how I see it." I really enjoy one-on-one conversation, I can talk about hardcore forever, or politics, or whatnot, but I like to hear what others have to say. I want to listen more than talk. But as far as writing some diatribe and then having it published for 10,000 people to read and interpret their own way, I wasn't into it at all. I wasn't a good writer. I change my mind all the time. I learn from people all the time, so I just felt like it wasn't for me. I don't want to be known as an individual, since I feel uncomfortable being in the spotlight; and that's what the column felt like to me. I applaud others who can do it though, and I enjoy reading some stuff related to music every now and then. Although I would rather spend my time reading history books than books about punk rock music.

**MRR: There seems to be a groundbreaking nature to 625 releases. I think of them as forerunners for various regional scenes that make up hardcore. What scenes do you try and reflect in hardcore? Do your releases reflect grind, power violence, thrash, crossover, fast core...**

Hirax Max: I don't think of 625 as groundbreaking at all. I only put out those things that appeal to my own tastes, which are really generic. What I mean is, I like energetic and fast punk rock, which can be categorized as everything from some forms of New York HC to grind to garage punk. That's why I thought I was horrible at reviewing stuff for MRR. I liked it all, and even some bad stuff had a little ounce of credit since they seemed to be at least putting their hearts into it.

As for the label, I'm not looking for that band that is completely advancing a style, or writing music that is one hundred percent groundbreaking. If the people in the band seem nice, and our politics don't clash, and they seem to play music that I like pretty well, then I would consider helping them out if need be. Of course, there are other factors, but basically I would consider a band, if they were nice people, if they sounded like anything from FEAR OF GOD to GORILLA BISCUITS, you know? I mean, that's a pretty wide margin. I'm not trying to pin down a "market", I'm trying to put out music that I like, made by people who I relate to. So that's everything, from mosh to thrash to power violence to grind to punk to whatever other term there is.

**MRR: In your opinion, what is the next thing to happen with hardcore? Felix Von Havoc approached this issue in a column of his, in which he thinks straight edge and d-beat will be converging. Where do you see musical influences within hardcore heading?**

Hirax Max: Who knows? I mean, we can all have projections of what might happen around the corner, but I'm not really concerned with that. I mean, four or five years ago people went gaga for math metal, stuff like DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN or even DISCORDANCE AXIS. The reviews said that it was never done before, it pushed things to the extreme, blah, blah, blah. For me, I never related to it cuz I thought it didn't have the catchiness or soul that the punk stuff I liked contained. So while everyone was throwing gas on that fire, I just wanted to hear more of the sound that I already knew I liked. If something comes along, some new style, or new vocal style, like how grindcore changed vocal styles in punk, that I can relate to, then I'll be a fan, but I'm not too concerned with what is gonna happen next.

**MRR: What are some of your observations with the various scenes that you have visited? Let's start off with North America. You have toured the states a bunch of times, where are the unique scenes and what contributions are they making on the current scene? What about some of the places abroad. You have been to Japan and your label spends some time documenting the current scene there. What are some of things about Japan's scene that are influencing hardcore? What about Brazil, what are some of your observations about Brazil in terms of lasting or significant input. How do Australia or Sweden factor into this?**

Hirax Max: At first I was going to approach this as a "what is the differences between scene cultures" question. But thinking of it in terms of "contributions"—this might be a tough one.

You know, punk is pretty much the same no matter where you go. There is a certain ethic that goes along with it: rebelliousness, DIY, and a rejection of the music industry, but the differences lie in how it gets culturally expressed. So the contributions are just different expressions of that same energy, that same rebelliousness.

And all the places I have been, and all the places where people I trade with are from, seem to generate multiple forms of punk rock. I mean, every scene has a thrash band, a grind band, a sXe band, a mosh metal band. Before I would travel to some place, in my ignorance I would think, "I wonder what this place will be like?" I'd think that it was going to be one hundred percent foreign and unusual to tour there, and every time, although there were differences, there were a lot of similarities, as well.

So, to answer your question, I think every place contributes a great deal to the collective history and effort of punk rock in multiple forms, its just that those scenes with the most wealth—US, Japan, Western Europe—tend to manufacture and distribute more of it, and tend to set the trends within it. Hopefully that will change a little. Also, although there is a really strong activist strain in the US and European scenes, I think that punks are more politicized in second- or third-world countries—I hate using those terms. In some places, just

to be punk is to risk your security, and in other places, like Brazil, even the bands that are playing generic forms of youth crew straight edge have super political ideals and things to say from the stage. These punks are politicized because their lives are politicized. I just wish these areas had as much focus on them as the tired old scenes that we constantly focus on.

**MRR: There seems to be a real cooperative spirit behind your label. 625 is involved in a lot of split and joint releases. You seem to get behind releases financially or with your distribution network, with your enthusiasm, with your name and reputation. How come you do so many co-releases? I see so many folks soured on cooperative ventures—it is refreshing to see somebody making it work. What is the secret?**

Hirax Max: The secret? Working with the right people is one. Generally, there are multiple reasons why I have been involved in coreleases. Sometimes a band asks a million labels for help, and those labels all put their heads together to see what they can do. Sometimes a label is going to release something and it's going to be only on CD, so I offer to do vinyl if I think it's a release that needs to be on vinyl. Or I'll release it if it's going to be released by a foreign label and I know not too many copies will make it to the States or Europe. Then there's also the fact that I like to work with other labels in the same way that I like to work with bands. You get to know someone better through doing a project with them, and you have more input and whatnot. If it works right, it's a better experience.

I have been involved in a few projects where I had no control over what was going on, I just added money in or something. And I got really frustrated with how I couldn't get represses, or how it came out. But that has only happened a few times.

On the other hand, I'm working on a compilation called *FOUR CORNERS* right now, and it has been in the works forever! Seriously, like two years, and three other labels are going in on it. Well, some shit didn't come through, mainly due to artwork problems. And, so, two years later, there are these labels who are waiting patiently to get this ball rolling, and I feel responsible since I was the facilitator of it. One of the labels had to drop out. Now the bands' artwork issues got resolved, and it is finally going, after almost two years. But it didn't turn out to be the experience I was hoping for when I first started the project.

**MRR: What is in the works for 625 Productions? What can we expect to see you release in the next little while?**

Hirax Max: Releases by:

- THE FUTURES (Japan) LP (vinyl version of CD on MCR)
- I QUIT! (Sweden) 2nd EP
- THEY LIVE (New York) brand new LP and CD (bonus tracks on CD)
- SPITFIRE (Japan) collection CD
- EU'S ARSE (Italy) collection LP
- CIRCLE (Japan) Debut EP
- KURBITS IR (Sweden) LP
- RAPED TEENAGERS (Sweden) collection
- FREAKS (Japan) EP
- SECRET 7 (Singapore) EP
- COMPLAIN (Japan) EP
- I SHOT CYRUS (Brazil) EP and LP
- NEVER CONFORM (Japan) EP
- REAGAN SS (US) debut EP
- RAZORS EDGE (Japan) Vinyl version of older releases
- HIGHSCORE (Germany) second LP
- REPROACH (Belgium) / MAD RATS (Portugal) split LP
- JELLYROLL ROCKHEADS (Japan) collection LP
- QUATTRO STAGIONE (Germany) 10" or LP
- DISCARGA (Brazil) / MAD RATS (Portugal) split EP
- WHAT HAPPENS NEXT (US) surprise EP
- FLASH GORDON collection release
- DYSTROPHY (US) EP

Plus the following compilations:

- Four Corners EP with: LIFE'S HALT (US), DEAD END (Sweden), HIGHSCORE (Germany), POINT OF FEW (Holland) and RAZLOG ZA (Croatia);
- Barbaric Thrash Vol. III 2xCD and EP - 34 new bands from all over the world, plus a crazy ASOCIAL demo from '82;
- Barbaric Thrash, Vol. IV (format?) - Working on it right now;
- Bay Area New Band comp EP with - VOETSEK, DYSTROPHY, DELTA FORCE, SCHOLASTIC DETH, ELEPHANT MAN, LAB RATS and SHARP KNIFE;
- SoCal New Band comp EP WITH APATHETIC YOUTH, HIT ME BACK, NERD ALERT, OUT OF VOGUE plus a few more;
- SE Asian New Band comp EP with: FOR THE KIDS, SECRET 7, EDORA, FASTGAME and DOMESTIK DOKTRINE; and
- Brazil New Band comp EP: in the works

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